

SECTION 1: WHAT COMMUNITY MEMBERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT AND SEX OFFENDERS


55 minutes



Lecture Content	Teaching Notes
<p>TOPIC: INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <p>At the conclusion of this section, you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Begin to replace some of the common myths regarding sex offenders and their victims with facts based on research and professional experience; ❑ Identify and verbalize your fears and perceptions regarding the presence of sex offenders in the community and, hopefully, reduce some of those fears; ❑ Have information about sexual assault prevention resources and victim services that are available locally; and ❑ Begin to consider how you might use the information that is presented during this session to protect yourselves, your families, and your communities from sexual assault. <p>Sexual assault is obviously a very serious issue, and there is a great deal of attention focused on high profile cases of sexual assault in the media. Ironically, much of what we do know comes under the category of “myth” rather than fact.</p> <p>To begin our session, we are going to do a little “true/false” quiz to highlight some common misconceptions and get some of the common sense facts out for discussion.</p> <p>As you will learn today, sexual assault is a widespread crime. It is likely that there are people in</p>	<p>➤ Use Slides #1-4: Title and Learning Objectives</p> <p>📖 Refer to Handout: <i>Cite or draw participants’ attention to the following document included in its entirety among the participant materials for section of the curriculum: the NIJ Research In Brief entitled <u>Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey, 1998. Rape in America: A Report to the Nation, 1992</u> is another informative document. It is available from the National Victim Center, Arlington, VA, for \$10.</i></p> <p>Given the tendency of the public to focus on sexual assault as a crime committed against children, this might be a good</p>


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<p>this audience who have been sexually assaulted or know someone who has been. For understandable reasons, the content of this training may make some people uncomfortable. If you find that the training is triggering some emotions for you, we have an advocate trained to work with sexual assault victims here with us. [Name of advocate or counselor] will be here for the duration of the training and is ready to talk to anyone in private and in confidence, should you feel it is necessary.</p>	<p><i>point to remind the audience that you use the term “sexual assault” broadly, to include unlawful sexual contact with adults, with children, and “hands off” sexual assaults, such as exhibitionism and “peeping,” among other crimes.</i></p>



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<p>TOPIC: FACTS REGARDING SEX OFFENDERS AND THEIR VICTIMS (30 minutes, including learning activity)</p> <p>Introduction (5 minutes)</p> <p>Society is full of misinformation about sex offenders: both who they are and who their victims are. In order to make informed decisions for your own safety, and for the community or society at large to take the necessary steps to prevent sexual assault, it is essential that you are aware of the most current, research-based facts about sexual assault and sex offenders.</p> <p>Learning Activity: True or False Quiz (20 minutes)</p> <p>Let us see how much we know—and see how much of what we think has been based on the myths we have all heard about sexual assault and sex offenders. Take 5 minutes to complete the True or False Quiz in your participant materials.</p> <p>Answers to Quiz:</p> <p>1. Most men who commit sexual offenses do not know their victim. False. 90% of child victims know their offender, with almost half of the offenders being a family member (Greenfeld, 1997). Of sexual assaults against people age 12 and up, approximately 80% of the victims know the offender (National Victim Center, 1992).</p> <p>2. Most sexual assaults are committed by someone of the same race as the victim. True. Most sexual assaults are committed by someone of the same race as the victim (Greenfeld,</p>	<p>It is essential that participants understand the difference between commonly held myths about sex offenders and the realities of their behavior. Without this understanding, members of the general public will continue to operate under false assumptions, a false sense of security, and misconceptions that may jeopardize their own as well as their neighbors' safety.</p> <p> Refer to Handout: The trainer should refer participants to the True or False Quiz.</p> <p>Have participants spend 5 minutes completing the True or False Quiz.</p> <p>➤ Use Slides #5-13: Facts About Sex Offending Behavior</p> <p>Follow completion of quiz with a discussion using slides to review the facts.</p> <p>This is a good opportunity for audience participation. Be sensitive to those who volunteer with an incorrect answer. Do not allow them to feel embarrassed for having been misinformed.</p>


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<p>1997). An exception to this is that people who commit sexual assault against Native Americans are usually not Native American (American Indians and Crime, 1999).</p> <p>3. Most child sexual abusers use physical force or threat to gain compliance from their victims.</p> <p>False. In the majority of cases, abusers gain access to their victims through deception and enticement, seldom using force. Abuse typically occurs within a long-term, on-going relationship between the offender and victim and escalates over time.</p> <p>4. Most child sexual abusers find their victims by frequenting such places as schoolyards and playgrounds.</p> <p>False. Most child sexual abusers offend against children whom they know and with whom they have established a relationship. Many sexual assaults of adult women are considered “confidence rapes,” in that the offender knows the victim and has used that familiarity to gain access to her.</p> <p>5. Only men commit sexual assault.</p> <p>False. While most sex offenders are male, research indicates that 20% of sex offenses against children may be committed by female offenders (Finkelhor & Russell, 1984).</p> <p>6. Child sexual abusers are only attracted to children and are not capable of appropriate sexual relationships.</p> <p>False. While there is a small subset of child sexual abusers who are exclusively attracted to children, the majority of the individuals who sexually abuse children are (or have previously been) attracted to adults.</p> <p>7. Children rarely make up stories of abuse.</p> <p>True. Children rarely make up stories of abuse.</p>	

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<p>While children who do lie can end up the subject of news reports and significant publicity, the fact is that such occurrences are unusual. Children are much more likely to withhold true information about being the victim of an assault or attempted assault than they are to make up a story of abuse.</p> <p>8. Victims of sexual assault are harmed only when offenders use force. False. More than any physical injuries the victim sustains, the violation of trust that accompanies most sexual assaults has been shown to dramatically increase the level of trauma the victim suffers. Emotional and psychological injuries cause harm that can last much longer than physical wounds.</p> <p>9. If a child does not tell anyone about the abuse, it is because he or she must have consented to it. False. Children often do not tell for a variety of reasons including the offender’s threats to hurt or kill someone the victim loves, as well as shame, embarrassment, wanting to protect the offender, feelings for the offender, fear of being held responsible or being punished, and fear of losing the offender who may be very important to the child or the child’s family.</p> <p>10. It is common for both child and adult victims of sexual assault to wait some time before telling someone about the abuse. True. It is common for victims of sexual assault to wait some time before telling someone. When the person was assaulted as a child they may wait years or decades. The reasons for this are numerous: victims may want to deny the fact that someone they trusted could do this to them; they may want to just put it behind them; they may believe the myth that they caused the assault by their behavior; or they may fear how other people will react to the truth.</p>	

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<p>11. If someone sexually assaults an adult, he will not target children as victims; and if someone sexually assaults a child, he will not target adults. False. Research and anecdotal evidence indicate that while some sex offenders choose only one type of victim (e.g., prepubescent girls, post-pubescent boys, adult women, etc.), others prey on different types of victims. Therefore, no assumptions should be made about an offender’s victim preference and precautions should be taken regardless of his crime of conviction.</p> <p>12. It helps the victim to talk about the abuse. True. The victim’s recovery will be enhanced if she or he feels believed, supported, protected, and receives counseling following the disclosure that s/he was assaulted. However, sexual assault victims should always have the choice about when, with whom, and under what conditions they wish to discuss their experiences. We have a handout with further information about how to help survivors of sexual assault in other ways.</p> <p>13. Sexual gratification is often not a primary motivation for a rape offender. True. While some offenders do seek sexual gratification from the act, sexual gratification is often not a primary motivation for a rape offender. Power, control, and anger are more likely to be the primary motivators. We will be discussing this in more detail in the next section of the training.</p> <p>14. Offenders could stop their sexually violent behavior on their own if they wanted to. False. Wanting to change is usually not enough to be able to change the patterns that lead to sexual offenses. To create the motivation to change, some offenders need a variety of treatment and corrective interventions, and for others learning how to make the change in their own behavioral cycle of abuse is</p>	<p> Refer to Handout: <i>Helping Survivors of Sexual Assault</i></p>


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<p>more effective.</p> <p>15. Men who rape do so because they cannot find a consenting sexual partner. False. Studies suggest that most rape offenders are married or in consenting relationships.</p> <p>16. Drugs and alcohol cause sexual offenses to occur. False. While drugs and alcohol are often involved in sexual assaults, drugs and alcohol do not <i>cause</i> sexual offenses to occur. Rather, drug and alcohol use may be a disinhibitor for the offender, while being under the influence may increase a potential victim’s vulnerability.</p> <p>17. Victims of sexual assault often share some blame for the assault. False. Adult and child victims of sexual abuse are never to blame for the assault, regardless of their behavior. Because of the age difference, children are unable to truly consent to sexual acts. They are often made to feel like willing participants, which further contributes to their shame and guilt.</p> <p>18. If a victim does not say “no” or does not “fight back,” it is not sexual assault. False. Sexual assault victims may not say no or not fight back for a variety of reasons including fear and confusion. Rape victims often report being ‘frozen’ by fear during the assault, making them unable to fight back; other victims may not actively resist for fear of angering the assailant and causing him to use more force in the assault. Pressure to be liked and not be talked about negatively by a peer will sometimes cause adolescents or children to avoid fighting back or actively resisting.</p>	<p>Victim-blaming. Be alert for attitudes that attempt to blame victims for being raped. Out of fear, people may try to distance themselves from victims.</p> <p>Personalizing the issue may be the only way to engender compassion for victims. If blame is expressed, probe the audience with such questions as: “Haven’t we all, or someone we loved, at one time or another, been in a risky situation?”</p>

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<p>Summarizing What We Know (5 minutes)</p> <p>What we currently know about sexual assault—that we integrated into the True or False quiz—comes from good research. I am now passing out some additional information about the sexual assault of children and adults that has been culled from recent national studies, and that includes references to those studies if you are interested.</p> <p>The statistics contained in this handout illustrate important points about the nature and prevalence of sexual assault. We will not spend time discussing each item on this list. I want to emphasize, however, the themes that emerge about sexual assault from the activity we just finished and the facts listed here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Sexual assault is widespread. ❑ Most victims of sexual assault know their perpetrators—the myth that the most pressing danger is from a stranger assault is just that, a myth. 78% of adult women who have been sexually assaulted and 90% of children under the age of 12 who have been sexually assaulted knew their perpetrators (Greenfeld, 1997). ❑ Few sexual assaults are reported. A 1992 study estimated that only 12% of rapes were reported (Kilpatrick, Edmunds, and Seymour, 1992). The National Crime Victimization Surveys conducted in 1994, 1995, and 1998 indicate that only 32% of sexual assaults against persons 12 or older were reported to law enforcement. (No current studies indicate the rate of reporting for child sexual assault, although it generally is assumed that these assaults are equally under-reported.) ❑ The majority of reported sexual assaults do not end in arrests or convictions. Of those sexual assault cases that are reported, only 2% 	<p>➤ Use Slide #14: The Studies</p> <p>📖 Refer to Handout: “<i>Facts About Sexual Assault</i>”</p> <p><i>The statistics contained in this handout counter many of the misconceptions people hold about sexual assault. However, unless members of the audience have questions about specific issues, it should be sufficient to highlight a couple of facts (emphasized by Slides 15 and 16) and provide the handout for them to study on their own.</i></p> <p>➤ Use Slides #15-16: Characteristics of Sexual Assault</p>

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<p>end in conviction (Senate Judiciary Committee, 1993).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ The trauma caused by sexual assault is profound and can include a wide range of emotional and physical after effects. Victims of sexual abuse are more likely to be victimized again over the course of their lives, are more likely to experience depression and other mental health problems, and are at an increased risk for social problems such as substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and homelessness (Kilpatrick and Saunders, 1997). <p>Locally, we have the following data describing incidents of sexual assault in this area. In reviewing these numbers, remember what we know about the underreporting of sexual assault.</p> <p>Before we conclude the introductory section of our program today, does anyone have any additional questions about sexual assault?</p>	<p> Refer to Handout: <i>Local Statistics (Distribute any information that you have been able to assemble about your community or jurisdiction.)</i></p>



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<p>TOPIC: TIPS ON REDUCING YOUR AND YOUR LOVED ONES' RISK OF SEXUAL ASSAULT (15 minutes)</p> <p>One of the major reasons why it is important to be informed about sexual assault is so that you can take steps to prevent it. And, there <i>are</i> indeed steps you can take to reduce your risk of sexual assault, your child's risk, or the risk facing others. Right now we are handing out a packet of information that provides guidance to parents about protecting their children and what to do if their child is sexually assaulted, including how to promote a positive healing process. There is also a handout from a nationally known coalition of sexual assault programs (CONNSACS) to help teens and adults reduce their risk. Some of the central themes of the risk-reduction material in general and in your packet, include the following:</p> <p>For Parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inform children that it is wrong for adults to engage children in sexual activity.• Stress to your child that he or she should feel comfortable telling you anything, especially if it involves another adult. And that if your child does not feel comfortable being completely honest with you, then together you should find another trusted adult your child can talk to in confidence.• Make an effort to know the people with whom your child is spending time.• Knowledge is power. This is especially true for protecting children from sexual assault. Teach your children about their bodies, give them the correct language to use when describing their private parts. Emphasize that those parts are private.	<p>Refer to Handouts: <i>Reducing the Risk of Sexual Assault Packet (including: You Can Protect the Ones You Love, Know the Rules: Just in Case..., Personal Safety Tips for Teens, Safety Tips for Kids and Parents, and Knowing My 8 Rules for Safety).</i> Cite or draw participants' attention to the Bureau of Justice Statistics report entitled <u><i>Sex Offenses and Offenders: An Analysis of Data on Rape and Sexual Assault, 1997</i></u>. The complete text of the report can be found among the Section 1 participant materials included with this curriculum.</p> <p>➤ Use Slides #17-20: Tips for Parents</p> <p>Encourage the audience to ask questions about these protection strategies. While there is no learning activity to accompany this information, it is important to make this section as interactive as possible.</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you know where each of your children is at all times. Know your children's friends and be clear with your children about the places and homes they may visit. Make it a rule that your children check in with you when they arrive at or depart from a particular location and when there is a change in plans. You should also let them know when YOU are running late or if your plans have changed so that they can see the rule is for safety purposes and not being used to 'check up' on them. • Never leave children unattended in an automobile, whether it is running or not. Children should never be left unsupervised or allowed to spend time alone, or with others, in automobiles, as the potential dangers to their safety outweigh any perceived convenience or 'fun.' Remind children NEVER to hitchhike, approach a car or engage in a conversation with anyone in a car who they do not know or trust, or go anywhere with anyone without getting your permission first. • Be involved in your children's activities. As an active participant, you will have a better opportunity to observe how the adults in charge interact with your children. If you are concerned about anyone's behavior, take it up with the sponsoring organization. • Listen to your children. Pay attention if they tell you that they do not want to be with someone or go somewhere. This may be an indication of more than a personality conflict or lack of interest in the activity or event. • Notice when someone shows one or all of your children a great deal of attention or begins giving them gifts. Take the time to talk to your children about this person and find out why the person is acting in this way. • Teach your children that they have the right 	<p> Refer to Handout: A <i>Parent Books List</i> is included among the participant materials for this section of the curriculum. Encourage participants to consider it a resource in talking with their children about sexual abuse in age-appropriate ways.</p>

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<p>to say NO to any unwelcome, uncomfortable, or confusing touch or actions by others. Teach them to tell you immediately if this happens. Reassure them that you are there to help and it is okay to tell you anything.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be sensitive to any changes in your children’s behavior or attitude. Encourage open communication and learn how to be an active listener. Look and listen to small cues and clues that something may be troubling your children, because children are not always comfortable disclosing disturbing events or feelings. This may be because they are concerned about your reaction to their problems. If your children do confide problems to you, strive to remain calm, non-critical, and nonjudgmental. Listen compassionately to their concern and work <i>with</i> them to get the help they need to resolve the problem. • Be sure to screen babysitters and caregivers. Many states now have public registries that allow parents to screen individuals for prior criminal records and sex offenses. Check references with other families who have used the caregiver or babysitter. Once you have chosen the caregiver, drop in unexpectedly to see how your children are doing. Ask your children how the experience with the caregiver was, and listen carefully to their responses. • Practice basic safety skills with your children. Make an outing to a mall or a park a ‘teachable’ experience in which your children can practice checking with you, using pay phones, going to the restroom with a friend, and locating the adults who can help if they need assistance. Remember that allowing your children to wear clothing or carry items in public on which their name is displayed can bring about unwelcome attention from 	

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not talk yourself out of feeling uncomfortable being alone with someone simply because he or she is an acquaintance or a friend of a friend—most sexual abusers are someone the victim knows.• Be wary of friends or dates that test your boundaries by making unwanted physical advances to you and then ignore or minimize your protests and other signs that you do not like their behavior.	



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<p data-bbox="188 302 786 422">TOPIC: BECOMING PART OF THE SOLUTION TO ENDING SEXUAL ASSAULT</p> <p data-bbox="188 436 324 468">(5 minutes)</p> <p data-bbox="188 506 922 930">So far today you have learned that sexual assault is widespread but that you can take precautions to reduce your own and others' risk of victimization. Because these crimes are typically committed in secrecy and engender great fear of reporting among victims, many sex offenders living among us have not been identified by our justice system. For this reason, it is important to take the precautions outlined here today, not just when a known sex offender is living in your community, but all the time.</p> <p data-bbox="188 978 932 1094">Most importantly, we all can help in preventing this horrible crime. To recap, some of the things you can do, you have already begun today:</p> <ol data-bbox="188 1140 932 1570" style="list-style-type: none">1. Educate yourself about sexual assault. (Your presence here satisfies this one!)2. Learn how to reduce the risk of sexual assault to yourself and others and how to get involved in prevention.3. Learn how to help survivors recover from sexual assault and heal.4. Learn about safe methods of managing sex offenders in the community.5. Learn about what is in place in your community to deal with sex offenders.	<p data-bbox="1065 228 1305 264">Teaching Notes</p> <p data-bbox="967 968 1370 1073">➤ Use Slide #23: What You Can Do To Respond to the Problem of Sexual Abuse</p> <p data-bbox="967 1266 1398 1570"><i>If you plan to go on using sections 3 and 4 of this curriculum, regarding management of sex offenders in the community, you might want to include items 4 and 5 here as a transition to the next part of your agenda.</i></p>

References

Bureau of Justice Statistics (1994, 1995, 1998). *National Crime Victimization Survey*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Finkelhor, D. and Russell, D. (1984). Women as perpetrators: Review of the evidence. In D. Finkelhor (Ed.), *Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory and Research* (pp. 171-187). New York: Free Press.

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Tjaden, P. and Thoennes, N. (1998). *Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.

Further Resources for Trainers

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, you will want to anticipate some of the questions that may arise in a meeting with community members. The following are some questions that are typical, along with preliminary suggestions for responses that may defuse an emotional situation and get people thinking in a positive direction. You will, of course, want to supplement these suggestions with your own responses in light of the specific occasion or conditions in your community. Below are some typical questions—and suggested responses—you might encounter.

I do not want to talk to my children about sexual abuse, because I do not want to frighten them. Is this really the right thing to do?

It is helpful for parents to keep in mind that:

- You, as a parent or adult, may be more uncomfortable or frightened by this than your children are;
- We provide safety information to our children in a number of other areas. (You can draw a parallel between teaching kids to “drop and roll” if clothes catch on fire [which is a pretty scary thought] or teaching kids to cross the street by looking both ways so they are not run over [which is also a pretty scary thought].)

You may want to provide audience members material that offers guidance about age-appropriate ways to talk to children about this topic such as those on the list of suggested materials included in the participant materials.

I am concerned that I really cannot tell who is and who is not a sex offender.

You are exactly right. There is no such thing as a typical sex offender. That is why it is important for you to understand common sense strategies for protecting yourself and your children that you should always follow.

To protect yourself from offenders, follow general safety guidelines, such as maintaining an awareness of your surroundings and trusting your instincts about people and situations. To protect your children, maintain open lines of communication with them—listen to your children; being available and taking time to really know your children builds feelings of safety and security.

Refer participants to handout materials with further information about protection of self, teens, and children.

How will I know if I can believe allegations about sexual assault—do people make false accusations?

The majority of victims tend to minimize sexual assault, or out of self-blame, fear, or shame do not disclose the abuse. This is particularly true of child victims. Research indicates that sexual assault is no more falsely reported than any other crime. The best approach is to believe the victim, listen to her or his allegations, offer your support, and support the victim in getting the help that s/he needs.

I am very concerned about protecting my child from this type of crime. In fact, I think if my child were a victim, I do not know how I could possibly handle it.

Perhaps the best thing to remember if you know or suspect that your child has been victimized is that they need you—more than ever—to be a calm, nurturing, and protective parent. The child has endured one of the most profound violations of her or his person. It will probably be extremely difficult for your child to disclose this to you, or to deal with the emotion of knowing that you are aware of what has happened to them. It will be even more difficult for your child if they observe you losing control of your own feelings or behavior. In order to help your child, and prevent further trauma to her or him, you have to be strong for her or him. Seek help for your child. Seek help for yourself in the form of specialized counseling to help you handle your reactions.

How can children ever recover from such an experience? (Or, if the questioner has had a child who has been victimized...) I am afraid that my child will be permanently damaged.

Children are amazingly resilient. Research suggests that children who are supported when they disclose or when the victimization comes to light heal more quickly than those who are not believed. A supportive family response and professional intervention can also help to heal child victims and their families.

Can I protect my child(ren)?

You can minimize the risk to your child(ren) by listening to their questions and concerns, talking to them about sex and sexual abuse, and ensuring an openly communicative family lifestyle where your child(ren) know they can come to you if they have questions, fears, and/or concerns.

I have heard that sometimes children willingly participate in sexually abusive activities, and that they are partially to blame.

Because of their age and the age difference between children and their perpetrators, children are unable to truly consent to sexual activity. They are never to blame for their

own abuse—although they are often made to feel like willing participants because of the careful, manipulative behavior of their abusers. This further contributes to their shame and guilt. If you have the occasion to be involved with a child who has been sexually abused—either your own child or another—one of the most healing responses is to reassure the child that they bear absolutely no responsibility for what an adult has done to them or made them do—even if they have been tricked into believing that the adult cares for them and what they were doing was “okay.”

With everything that parents hear about the dangers of abuse, how can you possibly avoid being overprotective with your children?

We all have to remember as parents that overprotectiveness and excessive fear can make our children feel helpless, whether about sexual assault or any of the other dangers that life holds. Information, common sense, and keeping lines of communication open with your children are much more productive than succumbing to irrational fear.

How will I know if my child is a victim? The thought that my child might actually be a victim and I might not know it is very worrisome to me.

The reality is that some instances of child sexual abuse never do come to light. However, the better informed you are about what to look for, the better the chance that you can know and be able to help your child. Trust your instincts; you know your child best. Any change in behavior that concerns you is probably worth evaluating.

Is the court process terribly traumatic for child victims? Might it be worse than the abuse itself?

If child victims are believed and supported, the court process can actually be a helpful experience for a child. Remember, part of the trauma of sexual assault is the loss of control over one’s own body. The court process—by believing the child, allowing the child to tell their own side of the story, and by holding the offender accountable—gives power back to the child. If the child feels empowered by the court process, the outcome can be positive. Be sure to find out in your own jurisdiction if there are special provisions made for child victims. If there is a child advocacy center where child victims can be interviewed in a child-friendly atmosphere by a skilled interviewer—this can be very reassuring to parents.

If my child were a victim of sexual abuse, would talking about it with my child afterwards make it worse?

Making the child talk when they are not ready and implying blame can make it worse. Encouraging your child to talk but not demanding or forcing information from her or

him is helpful.

If I suspect someone in my family of sexually abusing my child or another child in my family or neighborhood, what should I do? Should I confront them?

Your best approach is to contact the authorities and let them investigate. If you suspect the abuse because of something your child or another child has disclosed to you, your most important role is to believe and support the child.

What do I do, or whom do I tell, if I am sexually assaulted or my child is sexually abused?

Ultimately, the choice of reporting the sexual assault of an adult is a choice that a victim must make. Perhaps the best course of action is to call a rape crisis center to explore your options and what the implications might be for you. Clearly, criminal justice authorities will encourage you to come forward and report the crime to the appropriate agency. However, victims should always be encouraged to tell a trusted person who can support them through this process. (Be sure to have information on rape crisis resources in your community to give to meeting participants. Such a question may actually be a request for help for victimization.) In the case of the victimization of a child, there are certain agencies and individuals who are required by law to report. It would be helpful for you to gather information about the statutes governing reporting in your state. (It is recommended that you have these available as resources.)

If I am sexually assaulted I do not think that I could ever recover.

Although the pain of sexual assault is profound, victims do heal. The healing process will be smoother if you seek assistance from someone, a therapist or a victim advocate, who has experience talking to sexual assault victims. Tell someone you trust what has happened—do not struggle with it alone.

I do not know how to help a friend who has been sexually assaulted.

Listening to your friend without judging her/his choices is the best thing you can do. Reinforce the message that your friend is not to blame for what happened. Be sensitive to new fears and behaviors associated with the assault (such as avoiding crowds or feeling unsafe in previously comfortable locations). Most importantly, give your friend time to heal and let her/him know you are there to listen whenever needed. (Direct participants to handouts with more information on this.)

Is sexual offending on the increase or is there just more reporting?

We do not really know. Because most sexual offenses go unreported, it is difficult to tell. There is speculation among many in the field that the implementation of new laws related to the registration and community notification of convicted sex offenders may cause an even higher rate of underreporting (remember, most victims know their assailants and many may not want to subject them to public scrutiny). However, according to the National Crime Victimization Survey, victimization is increasing. In 1996, there were 307,100 victimizations of rape and sexual assault, and in 1999, there were 383,170 victimizations (an increase of 25%).